Entomon and the Bug

A Superhero Story

By Maryanne Peters

Part 1: Grub

Barrack Jones grew up next to the junkyard. His family were poor, but they had been able to secure an old trailer on industrial land behind it. The trailer was not big enough for all of them, so his mother and brother moved out. Barry chose stay with his father not because he was his preferred parent, but because he loved the junkyard and could not bear to leave it.

The yard was securely fenced and that fence-line monitored – perhaps more than would be expected – but he had access. Early on he had a small furrow to get under the fence, but over the years it had become a well-built tunnel. The present structure allowed for him to enter a concealed door well outside the view of CCTV surveillance and re-emerge inside also out of the range and angle of any cameras. Once there he had free range of the most interesting places in the junkyard.

He knew nothing of the owner or operator of the junkyard other than that he guessed that he might be a poor businessman. The trading part of the business was its own compound at the south end. It received steel and other metals including aluminum, lead, copper and brass and cut and sorted these to be rendered to ingots in the small foundry or dispatched if too large. Cars were stripped and crushed in this area, but electronics and other machinery was moved through the gate and into the main yard to be stacked in piles or dumped in one of the many dilapidated buildings on the site.

In recent years it appeared that there might be major work being done. On the side of the site facing the river where the crane for lifting scrap from barges still stood, a concrete structure was built linking the yard to the river, but inexplicably that was then covered with a bank of earth screening the junkyard from the river.

He had watched the work being done and so he knew about the concealed entrance to this structure masked with the wreck of an old truck. He also watched the single man who used that entrance and gained access to the underground complex almost every night. He would always be carrying or drawing a handcart full of bits and pieces.

Barry also collected bits and pieces and fashioned his own fantastical machines or sculptures, so he guessed that this man might be doing the same in his hidden workshop. Barry would leave some of his inventions around the yard, perhaps just to leave the message that the troglodyte builder was not alone. They must have been noticed, but none were destroyed. One which was the figure of a man with forearms decorated with bow saw blades he found with a medal hanging around its neck.

There was nothing worth stealing at the junkyard so it seemed a peaceful place, but elsewhere in the city things were not going so well. There was deprivation and violence in downriver and extending into the city center. The local police seemed corrupt or incompetent, or both. What was needed was a superhero.

But this story is not a fantasy or does not intend to be. Superpowers cannot be real so long as the laws of physics govern nature, and the laws of nature limit humanity. But still a superhero was needed, and then one day, one appeared.

This was a superhero more in the mould of Ironman or Batman. He was somebody who was using technology to acquire some strength, special abilities and enhanced protection. The photos taken of this “hero” leaving the scene after clearing up a den of drug dealers showed that he was wearing a special suit that clearly had an exoskeleton and armor, but also added two extra limbs on each side to carry weapons, apparently operated independently.

With six limbs instead of four he had styled himself as “Entomon” which, as all of the city came to learn, meant insect. He had announced that he was here to “fight crime and clean up the city”. He had apparently made a good start. All the criminals had been disabled but not killed, all the evidence of their crimes was still there, plus a video file of the whole thing.

Still the police felt it necessary to say that “Vigilantes are not be approved of let alone encouraged”. The public, however, were clamoring with excitement.

“A Real Life Superhero”, the headline read. And the following story: “The so called ‘Entomon’ crime fighter has put city police to shame. Not only has their inadequacy been revealed but their response is to call the hero’s action illegal.”

It was the topic of intense debate at River North High School, but Barry’s interest was limited. He was less interested in the exploits of this new champion than the suit he was wearing. The suit appeared bulletproof from the video made available, the carrying of extra weight was possible with hydraulic assisted legs and back, the extra arms seemed to carry telescopic rods that could deliver a stunning bolt of electricity, and the natural arms were free to access other weapons and devices on a classic utility belt. Then something caught his eye – the armor on those arms were decorated with bow saw blades.

This superhero struck him as having stepped out of his very own junkyard. Was it possible?

If a superhero is to have a lair, where better? And there was a secret place, which had only one visitor.

He decided that he would need to explore this. He would wait for the weekend to do it. What was required was to pass through the secret entrance behind the wreck of the truck, but that would not be easy. The entrance was controlled. But by chance the idea came to him and it was not his. It had been the subject of some lesson at school – a trojan horse.

The mysterious builder used a number of handcarts some which were left outside. Barry decided to use on of those. He would use a box of items and then conceal himself in the cart with this box lying over him. The trick was to pick items that would interest the builder – bow saw blades a few, but armor, telescoping rods, a marine emergency line-throwing tool – a collection that might be useful. He parked the cart, got inside and lifted the box on top, and he waited.

Barry actually fell asleep despite elevated excitement. He was woken when the cart was moved. It seemed that he might be being taken into the concrete structure under the stop-bank. He had the idea that he should jump out like a jack-in-the-box, but then he resolved that he would only do that if he was uncovered. He could hear movement and machinery for what seemed like hours, and then he heard a heavy door close, followed by silence. Now seemed the time to exit his Trojan horse.

It was just as he could, or any of us could imagine the secret headquarters of a superhero. It was concrete bunker with an elevated control room with TV screens for both site surveillance and news feeds, and scanners for police and emergency radio traffic. There was and an area clearly set aside for donning the suit. It had decontamination shower and a hot shower, it had a range of stretch garments hanging up, and three suits, in what seemed a progression of development. And there was a table of weapons and other equipment. There was no doubting what this was.

The suits were large. Even the man inside had to be over six feet but with the steel boots and the frame all the way up to the bullet proof helmet, the hero would stand much taller. He would tower of the modest sized Barry.

There was a gymnasium as well. He sat in the shoulder press machine and could not move the bar an inch. Whoever wore the suit was no weakling. But in that suit, he would seem to be invincible.

Then came a real surprise. At the far end, down towards the river and below was a long room, like a giant culvert pipe half filled with water, and sitting in it was what appeared to be a small submarine. This was how Entomon got in and out. It made sense. He could not fly. On any road he would be seen, even if he was ready to brave the traffic, but with this vessel his could leave his hideout unseen and be in the city in minutes, and never be seen in transit. There must be another hidden wharf in the city.

He walked down to the floating wharf beside the vessel. It was electric and on charge through a heavy cable. The hatch was open – big enough for the fully clad hero to step in a step out. But there was equipment aboard as well – it was a portable lair. He was keen to investigate further, but he heard something and spun around. There was a man standing there.

He was tall, and he recognized him as the man that he saw in the yard – the man who accessed this place almost daily. He should be furious, but he did not appear to be. There was a look of resination on his face, as if discovery of this place and all its secrets might be inevitable.

“You must be the sculptor,” he said. “You are the other occupant of the junkyard.”

“And you are Entomon,” said Barry, as if those words might protect him.

“Sometimes,” the man said. “When I need to be. But of course, nobody can know who I am and where I am based. So how can I persuade you to keep that as our secret?”

“Does it have to be? Or is that just what the comics say is necessary.”

“You think about it,” he said conversationally. “I have. You need home base secure, and secrecy is the best security. As for identity, I don’t want fame. I want to do good. I hope that you might want me to continue doing good. Is that what you want.”

“I want to do good things myself,” said Barry. “I love all of this”. He swept an arm towards the area above. ‘I want to help. If I was your sidekick then of course all secrets would be kept. They would be my secrets too.”

Part 2: Pupa

Barry told his father that he might be going away for a few weeks. He had an idea that his father thought that he may have re-established contact with his mother and brother, but sadly he had not. Before this he might have wished that he had, but for now his father could think what he liked.

Entomon (he declined to give his real name) had given Barry access to the secret base and encouraged his to adopt a rigorous program of diet and exercise to acquire strength and fitness. The skills would follow, but the first test was one of courage under stress, and that meant actually dealing with the bad guys alongside the hero.

Barry still had to attend school but graduation was close. Barry would collect his high school diploma but his career seemed already established. He would be a superhero, but perhaps in a more supporting role.

Entomon was in the bunker some evenings, working on what he said was Barry’s new hero suit - he kept it shrouded. He would sometimes observe Barry working on his exercises:

“Some people are just not built muscular,” he said, but he was definitely not one of them. “That does not mean that you cannot fight. You need to work on speed. You need to let your opponents size and strength work against them. I can point you in the right direction.”

There was nothing more important to Barry that being a successful sidekick. That means being able to join the fray, or so he thought.

It took some weeks before a suit was fashioned to fit Barry’s smaller frame. Barry was excited to see it unveiled, but when it was he was initially disappointed.

“It’s red and black and round. Yours is yellow and black and tall,” said Barry.

“Well, I am sort of a cricket or a locust,” said Entomon.  “You are a bug. As for your height, you are short, but I have added height in the shoes.”

“They look like high heels,” said Barry.

“Put it on, Bug,” he said. “You have to back into it. You will see that it has an exo-skeleton to allow you to carry armor, but it is lighter than my suit. I can use the fact that you are smaller and lighter to good effect. But first I need to know that you can hold your nerve. If you cannot then your role will be confined to base.  I will not put you in danger. Do you understand?”

“I am ready,” said Bug. “But what is my weapon?”

“Your role will be to protect my back. You have extra armour on your back and let me show you how to open up your wings…”.

“You mean I will be able to fly?”

“This is not fantasy,” Entomon scolded. He came forward to show how one hand could trigger the armour on his back to open. These wings are an extra shield to protect me and anybody in our care.

Bug pushed the button and the clatter behind him almost threw him off his feet. A large mesh screen had appeared out of his red solid curved cloak, large enough to cast a large shadow.

“This is great,” said Bug. “But what if I cannot get to you and you are under attack. I need to be able to do something. Can I have a gun?”

“We are not the police,” said Entomon. “We cannot face accusation if anybody dies, so my weapon is designed only to stun and immobilize. No guns.”

“Or something? I would feel helpless.”

“I have been working on a charge projectile system,” said Entomon. “You have the pylons to hang weapons systems.”

As Bug stood two black “arms” shot out from either side, evidently controlled by Entomon. They were like his - two extra arms making six limbs in all, just like Entomon. But they were empty.

“Let me work on those for you,” said Entomon. “But let us go out tonight to the corner of Station Road and 23rd Street where there are people causing trouble. It is just to see whether you have the ability to face violence, or not.”

“I am ready,” said Bug.

“Good! Because we leave immediately,” said Entomon.

They both walked to the submarine, climbed in and closed the hatch. Bug could see no windows. The river water was murky anyway. It appeared that the vessel knew the way, for only a short time later they appeared in a similar underground dock which Bug found was in the heart of the city down river.

As Bug had first suspected, this was the way to travel to and from the city in total secrecy. There was a concealed passage and they emerged on the other side of the Antunovic Riverside Tower, a mixed office and apartment building said to be owned by the reclusive billionaire Michael Antunovic.

It was only a short walk to the infamous corner of Station and 23rd, but they ran it. Entomon was right. Bug was light and fast and could get to each corner ahead of them before Entomon and check for trouble. It was like a scouting jeep in front of a heavy tank. Small had a role to play.

When they arrived at the corner they could hear the sound of a woman screaming. There were about 10 troublemakers threatening citizens and bystanders either watching or trying to ignore the criminal behavior.

“Back off and you will not be harmed!”  It seemed that Entomon’s voice was altered and amplified, but it was certainly threatening. The observing crowd backed away so that the 10 offenders could face the two superheroes.

“So look what we have here,” the leader of the ruffians called out, to the amusement of his colleagues. “Insect man, and little insect.”

Entomon looked at Bug, but neither could see the face of the other in their full-face helmets. Bug may have seen his partner shrug.

Entomon simply strode over, and started using his extendable “zappers” to send the offenders flying. Bug just followed and watched, but towards the end he turned to check whether anybody was behind. He saw nothing threatening, but plenty of people had their phones out and one had a camera.

It seems that young people pose by instinct these days. Was Bug even aware?

It was the feature in the Saturday morning press the following day. There was a small picture of Entomon doing his thing, but the main photo was of Bug himself striking that pose, as if he was a runway model in an outrageous item of wearable art.

The headline read: “Who is the sexy ladybird now working alongside Entomon?”

“Ladybird?  What the fuck?” said Bug as Entomon held it up for him to see the moment he came in.

Entomon started reading from the article: “Last night the world’s first real life superhero Entomon, who has been active in the city for the last two months, was joining by what maybe his girlfriend or even his wife, clad in an armored ladybird suit. The newly named “Ladybird” or “Ladybug” also sports killer heels and red ponytail, and struts her stuff alongside her man.”

“What ponytail?” said Bug. “Why do they think that I am a girl?”

Entomon walked over to Bug’s suit, hung up just as it had been left when they got back exhausted less than 12 hours before. He lifted it off the stand. What Bug had never noticed when he had backed into and worn it was that the red carapace had seven large black dots on it, and the helmet did indeed carry a large decoration at the back which could properly be called a ponytail of thick red hair.

“I am a ladybug. You dressed me as a ladybug,” he said, staring accusingly at Endomon.

“I am looking after you,” said Endomon. “Or doing my best to do that.

“They think I am your girlfriend.”

“Good. Maybe they will think twice before they attack you.”

“Or maybe not,” said Ladybug. “I still want a weapon.”

 “Well, the lady gets what the lady wants,” teased Endomon. “Have another look at the front of your suit.”

He spun it around and flicked a control so that the extra arms shot out, each now armed with what looked like a grenade launcher with a squashed barrel.

“What does it do?” asked Bug

“It fires energized projectiles which can knock people out for a few minutes,'' he said. “But there are only 10 projectiles each side and enough energy to charge those 20, so do not spray them around. These are a last resort weapon.”

“I’ll forgive you for dressing me like a girl, then”, said Bug. “Maybe people will take me more seriously if I can shoot stun grenades?”

“It is just one article,” said Endomon. “And I will have the ability to control them as well as you. Remember - I am the superhero. You’re just the sidekick. I doubt whether there will be much more about you.”

But it would seem that superheroes have no special abilities or insight into matters of publicity, because the press could not get enough of “The Ladybug”. When she appeared with her weaponry for the first time, it caused a sensation, and when the first was used on a fleeing bank robber, the crowds and the press went stratospheric.

“Ladybug’s kiss downs would be robber” read the headline. There was an image of a man holding the flat oval upon which a pair of lips had been drawn in lipstick. Further on another article speculated that “Endomon and Ladybug are clearly in a very close relationship and must be lovers.” The fashion pages talked about “Ladybugs sense of style is that of the modern woman - ambitious with being overly aggressive and strongly feminine”. The Ladybird pin became and essential fashion item for women wanting to feel empowered.

“You’re not jealous are you?” Bug found himself saying it in a way that was mischievous and coy even in a girlish way.

“Not at all, and in fact I like it this way. I told you I am not looking for fame. They are not asking the obvious question ‘who is Endomon’, but instead ‘who the hell is Ladybug’. I am free to do what I want. All eyes are on you, my sexy girlfriend.”

The last words may have been intended to sting, but to Bug they had another effect, although not one easily described. Working alongside Endomon as he had, meant that he had new respect for this remarkable man and his abilities - both technological and physical. Bug was not a superhero himself, and he suspected he never would be. As a sidekick he was perhaps largely ineffective in a fight. But the Ladybug, at least accordingly to the press, was the heart of the hero, his reason for existing, the damsel behind his quest, his rock and the lighthouse upon it. She was the real hero here.

The following day Barry dyed his hair red, and he resolved that he would grow it long.

Part 3: Imago

The sunrise sent a plane of orange light through the floor to ceiling windows of the penthouse apartment atop The Antunovic Riverside Tower. The morning was still and the river many storeys below was like a mirror. The light caught the brass sculpture on the sideboard – a man and woman embracing composed of small pieces salvaged from a junkyard.

At the large table sat the impressive frame of Michael Antunovic reading the morning news. At his elbow was a cup of hot coffee made from the highest quality beans from his own estate in Guatemala. He sat here rather than in the kitchen to enjoy the most expensive view in town, but worth every penny at moments like this.

It may have been the scent of her, but he liked to think that he could sense her presence without it. She moved in silence, as she did, the silk robe over her naked body and the bare feet on the floor making no sound.

“I hope you did not find that charity thing last night to boring,” he said without looking around.

She took his head in her hands and kissed the top of it.

“Was there a charity thing last night?” she said. “To be honest I can only recall the sex we had after it, and the sex this morning.”

She stepped into his view and let the silk robe parted to reveal her gorgeous body – ripe breasts and perfect abdomen, and just a rose of pubic hair above her sex. He red hair tumbled around her shoulders, her big brown eyes under long dark lashed invited him in.

But she glanced at what she was reading. She asked: “Any crime in the city last night?”

“Nothing,” he said. “All is well. Maybe we should go to the house in the Bahamas for a week?”

“Nobody wants rescuing, or punishing?”

“Criminals are discouraged … or at least discrete. But I think what they fear most is the kiss of the Ladybug.”

“You mean this?” she bent over and pushed her hot lips against his, teasing his tongue with her own.

“It kills me every time, but it is not supposed to,” he laughed.

“I am almost disappointed,” she said. “I do love our outings. I love being together as Mr. and Mrs. Antunovic, but somehow with 6 limbs each it is that must more exciting!”

She plunged her hand between his legs and made him jump.

“Hey Bug, let me finish my coffee first!” It was a pretend complaint.

“Now don’t call me Bug. It will get tongues wagging. You can use that name in the nest, and only the nest. Up here and out of costume, I am Imogen.”

Her face was still close to his, and he played with her hair falling around him. “Tell me why that name?” he asked, not for the first time.

“Because, as you know, the imago, or the imagene in the feminine, is the last stage of metamorphosis. I started as grubby thing and then in the nest I pupated, and now here I am – the finished creature. Your mayfly, or scarab, or butterfly.”

“My Ladybeetle,” he said kissing her again. “Did I do you wrong, Darling. I dressed you as a feminine creature to protect you. From the moment I met you that was all I wanted to do. And now you are a woman. Do you think me twisted? I like to think that I saw the Ladybug in the grub.”

“She was there as sure as I am here,” she said. “You forced none of this on me. You offered me a life of excitement in the interests of the very highest of causes working side by side a man who I thought that I just admired, but I now know I was hopelessly in love with.”

“It’s all done now. No going back. Made woman and made wife.”

She plonked herself down on his lap, her naked vulva feeling his rise between her silk and his, still tingling from only the 27th time he had entered it. “I want to be the woman and the wife I am. After all, we are insects you and I. Who would be a drone when you can be a queen?”

The End

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Author’s Note:

Erin has been on at me to write a superhero story, but the strong grip that reality has on me (rather than the other way around) has prevented me. Upon her last idea I said “I like the idea of the kid demanding to be a sidekick and the hero making the costume feminine I am just not ready to make them insects!” but clearly she has prevailed.